



Central Council of Church Bell Ringers
"Registered Charity number 270036"

Tower Stewardship Committee

TOWER MANAGEMENT

This leaflet is one of a series of leaflets produced by the Tower Stewardship Committee of The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers giving guidance to ringers, PCCs and clergy on external factors that may affect the ringing of church bells. Other leaflets in the series address child protection, insurance, health & safety, fire assessment and church law.

As most of the ringing towers in the world come under the jurisdiction of the Church of England, they have been produced with this in mind. However, most of the principles addressed will apply to other areas. However, it is recommended that if needed, more specific local advice should be sought.

At all times church bells are rung in accordance with a request or instruction from the incumbent. To enable this to be done, it is important that the bell tower is managed.

The good management of a bell tower is important to ensure that (a) the bells & fittings, which are the property of the Church, are used correctly, maintained properly and not allowed to fall into disuse or disrepair and (b) the quality and quantity of ringing is controlled so that the Church is able to maintain a good relationship with the wider community.

The nature of the management required will vary with circumstances but can be broadly divided into two types

1. Towers with resident ringers.
2. Towers with no resident ringers.

Towers with resident ringers

It is usual for one of the ringers to be appointed as Tower Captain. The method of appointment can vary from democratic election by the ringers to direct appointment by the incumbent. Some towers have found that holding an Annual General Meeting and electing officers is the best solution.

No matter how the appointment is made, the Tower Captain is an office bearer within the Church and must therefore be acceptable to the incumbent and administrative body (usually the PCC) as well as to the ringers.

The Tower Captain manages the bell tower on behalf of the incumbent, who always has ultimate authority. He is the leader and figurehead of the team and the ringers' representative to the outside world. Depending on the numbers and skills within the team he may be supported by other officers such as a Ringing Master, Secretary, Instructor and Steeple Keeper.

The Tower Captain does not have to be the most skilled ringer in the team. He must, however, have good leadership qualities and be able to make all individuals feel valued as members of the team and to encourage their development as ringers. He should also encourage a team spirit and be able to resolve differences when they occur.

Where possible, the Captain should delegate roles and responsibilities to various members of the team. Different people can bring different skills to the team, and these people should be encouraged to assist in the management of the tower. Others may be encouraged to learn by becoming assistants to these officers, in time they will then be able to fulfil the role themselves and thus ensure the continuity of the team. Many a shrinking violet will blossom forth if carefully nurtured. However, if individuals do not want to assume responsibility for something, then their wishes must be respected otherwise a valuable member of the team may be lost.

Where a team is low in numbers, the various tasks will probably be shared informally amongst the members with particular people gravitating towards particular tasks. The team leader, in the form of the Tower Captain, will be agreed by common consent. It is advisable to ensure that a certain amount of knowledge is shared so that, should one individual become unavailable, the team does not suffer too much. Even straightforward steeple keeping tasks such as replacing a broken stay can assume frightening proportions to the inexperienced.

Some teams may elect the Tower Captain and then leave him to make other informal appointments as he sees fit, other teams may choose to formally elect all the officers at an Annual General Meeting. Each team will follow its own customs and practices in this respect; there is no standard formula that can be applied universally.

The Tower Captain will on occasion have to represent the team on the church's administrative body or in the wider community. He should ensure that he is prepared for such meetings with all the relevant facts and be sure to act firmly but also fairly. At all times he is an ambassador not only for his own tower but also for the whole ringing fraternity.

While the incumbent and administrative body of the church are responsible for Health & Safety, the Tower Captain should be familiar with issues that may affect the tower and ringers. He should maintain a regular dialogue with the authorities to ensure that both sides are familiar with each other's requirements and that no conflict of interests occurs.

The Tower Captain should also ensure that any policies that may be applied by the administrative body, such as the protection of young people, are enforced in the tower in line with recognised good practice.

Towers with no resident ringers

In towers where there are no resident ringers, the incumbent bears the responsibility for the management of the tower and bells. Unless he has the good fortune to be a competent ringer himself, he should seek expert advice.

This can be achieved informally by approaching the ringers in a neighbouring parish; or formally by contacting the local Diocesan Guild or Association, or the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

There are three aspects that need to be considered

(a) Are the bells in a fit state to be rung? If they are not rung on a regular basis, or have been silent for some time, then it is advisable to have them checked over occasionally by somebody competent to do so. Quite often, a little care and attention can go a long way towards maintaining an installation.

(b) How often are the bells going to be rung? If the bells have been silent for a while, suddenly introducing regular service ringing and practice nights can cause annoyance to the neighbours, and in extreme cases can lead to a court order restricting or preventing the ringing of the bells.

If ringing is to be restricted to occasional service ringing and visiting teams, it would be advisable to notify those who may be affected on each occasion.

If it is intended to reintroduce regular ringing, then it is advisable for the local community to be consulted about appropriate times and periods of ringing. Sound control may also have to be considered if the bells are particularly loud or extended periods of ringing are intended.

(c) Who is going to ring the bells? Unless it is the intention to have a new local band of ringers trained, then the bells will be rung either by a neighbouring local band or by a visiting band.

A neighbouring band will usually be prepared to take responsibility for organising ringing in the tower and will agree a set pattern such as First Sunday in each month, or one practice night per month. They will ensure that all ringers present are competent to ring.

A visiting band may have a wide range of ability and, if the incumbent should have any reservations, he should ask for further references at the time of booking. These can then be checked with the local Guild.

It is usual for a visiting band to write in advance to request permission to ring on a particular occasion. If a band should appear unannounced and request a ring, they should be politely refused, as the incumbent will be unable to check their credentials.

Further Reading

1. The Tower Captains Handbook, pub. CCCBR
2. The Tower Handbook, pub. CCCBR
3. Guidance Notes for Churches, Section 3, pub. Ecclesiastical Insurance
4. The Bellringers Bedside Companion, pub. Sue Coleman Publishing
5. Getting it Right, pub CCCBR

For further information, contact the Chairman of the CCCBR Tower Stewardship Committee:

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See <http://www.cccbr.org.uk/tsc> for contact details

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